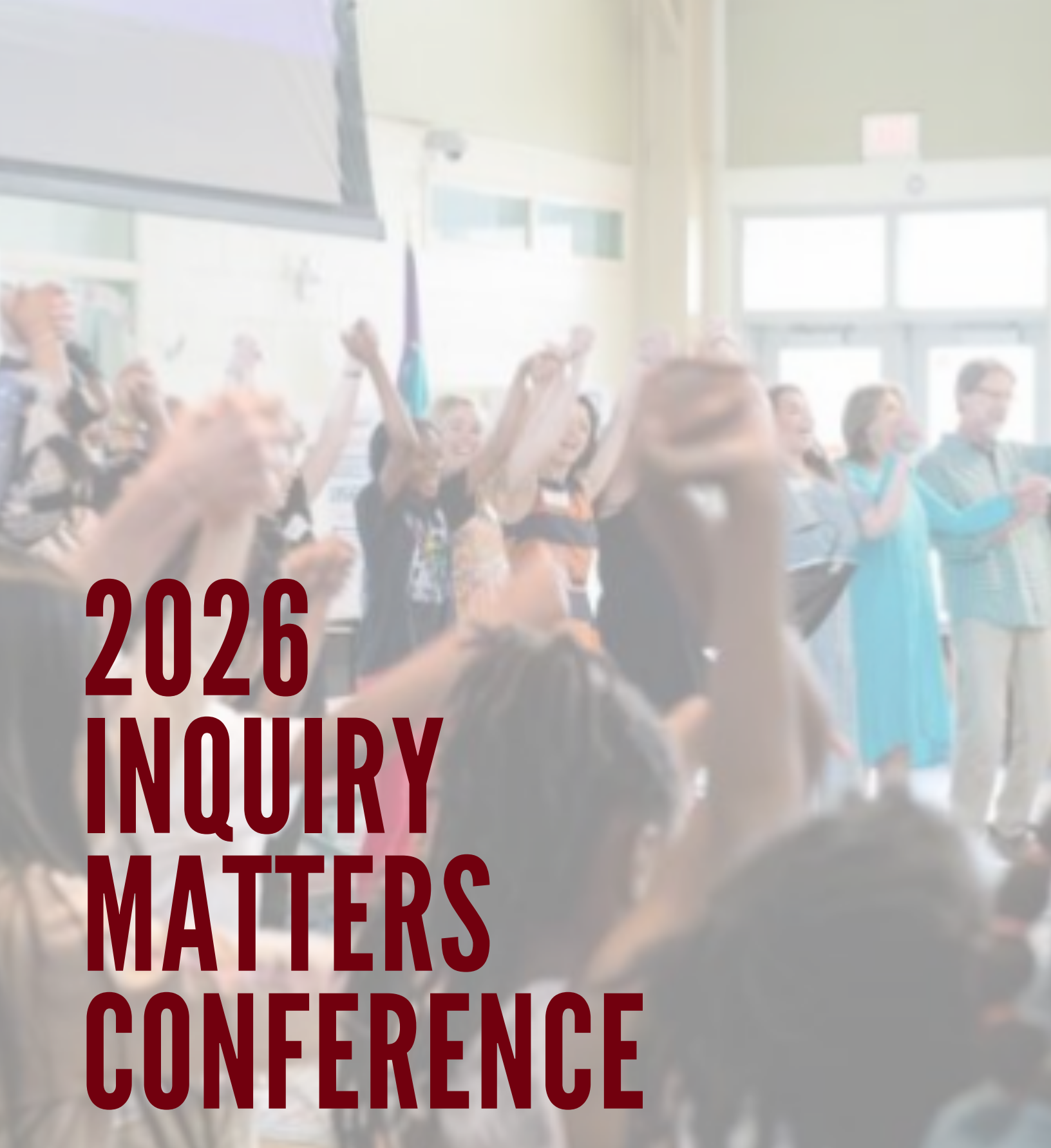




2026 INQUIRY MATTERS CONFERENCE

APRIL 25TH, 2026
CENTER FOR INQUIRY

PROGRAM

7:30 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.

**Registration, Continental Breakfast, Professional
& Children's Books Sales, & CFI Expert Projects**

8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

Opening Address

**Opening Song: "Together We Can Change the
World"**

Mark Shepard

Performed by CFI Students

Welcome

Drs. Kim Moore & Emily Whitecotton

Creating Cultures of Literacy through Inquiry

Heidi Mills, Liz Baranik, Taylor Wuerfel, Jessica Steedly,
Tiffany Palmatier, Katherine Covar, Nozsa Kyler, Sequoia
Hampton, Brandi Cade, Tracy Etu, Hannah Frederick,
Mackenzie Thompson-Mujica, Tameka Breland,
Tianna Myers, & Emily Whitecotton

8:55 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions A

9:45 a.m. – 9:55 a.m.

Intermission – Meet up in #16

Children's & Professional Book Exhibits in #14

9:55 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions B

10:45 a.m. – 10:55 a.m.

Intermission – Meet up in #16

Children's & Professional Book Exhibits in #14

10:55 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions C

11:45 a.m. – 11:55 a.m.

Intermission – Meet up in #16

Children's & Professional Book Exhibits in #14

11:55 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Closing Address

From Reflection to Action

Heidi Mills, Jordan Page, Eliza Braden, Lesley Snyder,
Quantina Haggwood, & Regina Ciphrah

8:55 AM - 9:45 AM

Concurrent Sessions A

MANY VOICES, ONE CLASSROOM: BUILDING COLLABORATION ACROSS THE K-2 DAY

Taylor Wuerfel

This session explores how collaborative learning can be woven throughout the K–2 day. Teachers will see examples such as purposeful turn-and-talks, buddy reading, expert research groups, cross-grade reading partnerships, and meaningful morning meetings—leaving with practical strategies to foster student talk, shared thinking, and problem-solving across content areas.

204

K-2
Teachers

CULTURE BEFORE CURRICULUM: STRENGTHENING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY THROUGH ROUTINES AND RITUALS

Jessie Steedly

This session examines how classroom routines and rituals build trust, accountability, and character in K–2 classrooms. Participants explore strategies that strengthen students' sense of self while developing empathy, respect, and care for others. A connected classroom community supports empowered learners. Participants leave with practical ideas to strengthen classroom culture and support the whole child.

203

K-2
Teachers

A DAY OF LEARNING: LIVING IN A CULTURE OF LITERACY

Michelle Kimpson

This session invites participants to step inside a classroom and experience a day shaped by a culture of literacy. Through authentic examples of reading, writing, math, and inquiry, attendees will explore how literacy lives throughout the day, supports student engagement, and deepens learning across content areas.

201

K-2
Teachers

UNIT DESIGN AND REFLEXIVITY: THE HEART OF INQUIRY PRACTICE

Stephanie Rudmann

Are you interested in learning how to center narrative and informational writing within inquiry-based units? Come learn how to invite students to model writing after mentor authors and engage as researchers who ask and answer questions to write knowledgeably about curricular topics. This session will also highlight the role of teacher reflexivity—reflecting during and after instruction to refine practice and reimagine learning experiences for students.

103

3-5
Teachers

REPURPOSING MORNING MEETINGS WITH INQUIRY IN MIND

Nozsa Kyler, Tianna Myers, & Students

Morning meetings have long been used as a time for greetings and reviewing the forecast for the day. However, it can be given more purpose with inquiry at its heart. Through the use of journals and articles, morning meetings become a place where kids can ask questions about their world and think together. It becomes an additional space for them to learn and grow as academic beings, community members, and citizens of a democratic world. Come prepared to learn not only how you can implement this in your own classroom, but also to engage in a morning meeting with fellow second and fifth-graders.

105

2-5
Teachers

8:55 AM - 9:45 AM

Concurrent Sessions A

LEARNING LABS AS CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Brooke Fonder

Follow alongside one school's journey with Learning Labs and see firsthand how the implementation of language-centered Learning Labs changed a school's culture and increased professional dialogue. In this interactive session, coaches and educators will have the opportunity to reimagine the use of Learning Labs as opportunities to enhance student learning, bolster teacher professional development, and ultimately increase student achievement.

101

K-5 Teachers,
Coaches, &
Leaders

USC + 2 = 1 SUCCESS: A SOCIAL STUDIES AND MATHEMATICAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SECOND GRADERS AND USC INTERNS

Sequoia Hampton, Lyn Mueller, USC Interns, & Students

Join second graders and USC interns as they showcase how they learned about engagement and each other through a weekly partnership focusing on the social studies standards that address currency, budgeting, and community building. A variety of strategies will be presented to demonstrate how these cooperative explorations built knowledge, explored culture, and created relationships.

301

K-5
Teachers

CURIOSITY IN A TRADITIONAL CONTEXT: WHAT I USED TO THINK...BUT NOW I KNOW

Crystal Boyd, Megan Drayton, & Shiniqua Mays

Through reflection prompts, shared experiences, and guided inquiry, participants will engage with the question: *How does curiosity change the way we lead, learn, and respond to challenges?* This session highlights practical ways to embed inquiry into daily practice: using questions rather than quick answers, viewing challenges as data, and leveraging reflection to drive continuous improvement- while honoring the realities of traditional systems. Participants will leave with actionable strategies to shift thinking, refine practice, and lead with curiosity and purpose.

102

3-8
Teachers,
Coaches, &
Leaders

INCLUSION IN ACTION: BUILDING CLASSROOMS OF ACCESS & BELONGING

Koehler Beard & Hannah Frederick

How would our classrooms change if we took a more neuroaffirming approach, emphasizing students' strengths over their challenges? This session introduces inclusive practices that nurture diverse neurotypes and how classroom choices build belonging. The presenters center empathy, connection over compliance, and clear, positive feedback—equipping educators with practical strategies and confidence to recognize strengths, support neurodivergent learners with compassion, and create inclusive classrooms that ensure equitable access so every learner thrives.

303

K-5
Teachers

OUR CAROLINATIP JOURNEY: NOVICE TEACHER STORIES OF GROWTH & SUPPORT

Angela Adams, Mikayla Carter, Johanna Guilford, Sarah Harllee, Kristina Hill, & Julia Walker

Designed for anyone wanting a glimpse into the experience of new(ish) teachers, this presentation focuses on stories from the field as recounted by educators who student-taught just a few years ago. The teachers will share their beginnings, their growth, and what's on the horizon for them. The session will include an overview of the Carolina Teacher Induction Program and its proven support of novice educators.

304

4K-12
Teachers

8:55 AM - 9:45 AM

Concurrent Sessions A

CULTIVATING CURIOSITY: INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

Colavito McKie, Jr. & Students

“Student engagement represents the total of their investment in learning, commitment to academic success, ongoing curiosity, expressive creativity, and development of positive relationships with others.”
– Hanover Research Center

In this session, teachers gain insight into how to help students refine their scope of inquiry in core subject areas, using practices that encourage questioning, collaborative learning, and deep understanding. With a focus on the art of inquiry, participants will learn firsthand what inquiry practices look like at the upper elementary level, while incorporating engagement strategies that support reading, writing, and joy from learning history.

104

3-5
Teachers

BUILDING THINKING CLASSROOMS

Margaret Nickerson & Brooke Bridges

Building Thinking Classrooms, by Peter Liljedahl, is a collection of 14 practices rooted in moving away from mimicking and toward thinking. Join our interactive session and get immersed in the experience of being a thinker!!!

202

K-5 Teachers
& Instructional
Coaches



9:55 AM – 10:45 AM

Concurrent Session B

IS ANYONE TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO SPELL ANYMORE?

Tiffany Palmatier & Students

In this session, Tiffany will share her inquiry into spelling instruction. Participants will experience stories of trial and error, learn about the actions taken after unsettling conversations with parents accustomed to spelling tests grounded in rote memorization, and witness Tiffany conferring with growing writers to promote spelling awareness.

202

K-2
Teachers

MATH IN MOTION: A HANDS-ON APPROACH TO MATH WORKSHOP

Jessie Steedly

Discover how to bring math workshop to life in early childhood classrooms. This session shares a practical framework for math workshop, strategies for building strong number sense, and ways to structure spiral review through hands-on stations and games. Participants will explore engaging K-2 math games that promote thinking, independence, and joyful learning.

203

K-2
Teachers

THE WORK OF PLAY: HOW PLAY BECOMES THE ENGINE FOR INSTRUCTION

Jordan Page

Play is the vehicle for learning, not a distraction from it. This session identifies common misconceptions that prevent play from being safeguarded in early childhood classrooms. Grounded in research, participants will explore why purposeful play matters and leave with a toolbox of small, manageable shifts to embed play into the day in ways that elevate engagement and launch meaningful instructional units.

201

K-2
Teachers

SCAFFOLDING WRITERS: INTENTIONAL MODELING, RESPONSIVE ORGANIZERS, AND AI SUPPORT

Rossi Hall & Alyssa Powers

This session will explore effective ways to scaffold writers through intentional modeling and the use of strategic graphic organizers that are responsively created and aligned to ELA standards and student needs. Participants will learn how to assess student needs using writing samples and kid-watching observations, and how to integrate MagicSchool AI as a supportive tool throughout the writing process.

303

2-8
Teachers

NIFTY NONFICTION: A CROSS-CURRICULAR INVESTIGATION INTO ANIMAL CLASSES

Brooke Fonder, Kaitlyn Foy, Emilie McFall, Gina Morris, Sarah Sellers, & Students

In this session, participants will have the opportunity to follow alongside a team of teachers, ranging from veteran to brand-new, at Satchel Ford Elementary as they conduct a nonfiction inquiry project on the 5 classes of animals to coincide with their grade-level science standards. Watch as teachers and students discuss their deep dive into the world of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, as they investigate, through an exploratory lens, the art of reading, researching, and crafting clever nonfiction writing.

101

3-5
Teachers

9:55 AM – 10:45 AM

Concurrent Session B

KIDWATCHING AND ITS IMPACT ON PRACTICE

Beth White

What teachers believe about children as readers and writers shapes what they notice and how they respond. This session explores how kidwatching, paired with reflection on teacher beliefs, informs instructional decisions. Through examples and reflection, participants will learn how observing literacy behaviors guides intentional planning for whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction that honors every learner.

105

K-8
Teachers,
Coaches, &
Leaders

IGNITING STUDENT PURPOSE: BUILDING AGENCY THROUGH INQUIRY AND COMPASSION WITH SOLUTION-FOCUSED COMMUNITY IMPACT PROJECTS

Teresa Randolph, Jennifer Layton, & Students

Empower students as world-changers through the Team Landolph model, which uses inquiry-based learning to build awareness, compassion, and problem-solving for positive community impact. Teresa Randolph, Jennifer Layton, and team members share the framework and key moves that guide students from problem identification to project implementation while developing systems thinking, 21st-century skills, and strong school-community connections for teachers, coaches, and administrators.

103

3-5
Teachers,
Coaches, &
Leaders

INQUIRY THAT HONORS TEACHER VOICE: REFLECTIVE PATHWAYS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Elizabeth Scarbrough

This session explores how no-cost micro-credentials and flexible online learning modules can personalize professional learning through teacher reflection and classroom inquiry to support writing instruction. Participants will examine how educators use reflective prompts, classroom evidence, and feedback cycles to guide instructional decisions. Classroom examples illustrate how competency-based learning honors teacher voice and supports meaningful instructional shifts. Offered through the South Carolina Writing Improvement Network, participants will leave with optional access to a no-cost micro-credential they can complete at their own pace.

204

K-8
Teachers

EXPLORING MATHEMATICS WITH HOME RUNS AND BALLPARK DIMENSIONS

George J. Roy & Matthew Cunningham

During this session, presenters will explore tasks to discuss how they empowered middle school students to use their geometric reasoning to investigate real-world problems involving baseball stadiums.

102

6-8
Teachers

LEADING WITH PURPOSE: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES THAT TRANSFORM SCHOOLS

Megan Drayton

Participants will engage in inquiry around key questions such as: What do we believe about student potential? How do our beliefs show up in our leadership actions? Which practices most effectively build trust, strengthen instruction, and sustain improvement? The session will support leaders in identifying aligned beliefs and practices, analyzing their impact, and determining next steps to lead change with coherence, consistency, and purpose.

302

K-8
Coaches &
Leaders

9:55 AM – 10:45 AM

Concurrent Session B

ELEVATING INSTRUCTION: CULTIVATING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR COACHES AND EDUCATORS

Kendra Lynn & Richland One Literacy Coaches

Effective instructional coaching is a cornerstone of fostering teacher growth and enhancing student learning outcomes. In this session, participants will explore practical strategies for creating and sustaining robust support systems that empower both instructional coaches and educators. Participants will gain insights into how to build a collaborative coaching culture, provide ongoing professional development, and tailor support to meet the unique needs of teachers.

301

K-8
Coaches &
Leaders

NEUROSCIENCE AND LITERACY

Lucy Spence

Knowledge of brain development related to learning is essential for teachers and other educators. Current neuroscience findings have shown that literacy involves multiple dimensions. Literacy education should include these multiple dimensions to be effective for building reading foundations, fluency, and comprehension. This presentation will provide current neuroscience findings linked with lesson ideas that include visual, phonological, embodied, and cultural dimensions.

304

K-12
Teachers,
Coaches, &
Leaders

BITES AND BEATS: WRITING WITH THE RHYTHM OF FOOD AND MUSIC

Valente' Gibson, Jacqui Witherspoon, & Eliza Braden

This session aims to equip educators with practical strategies for incorporating student interests into writing instruction. The presenters will showcase how to create engaging writing units that connect with students' cultural backgrounds, which fosters deeper engagement and enhances writing skills. By examining curriculum units centered around universal themes such as food and music, attendees will explore effective approaches to making writing instruction more meaningful and inclusive. Participants will leave with a template plan and actionable strategies to improve student writing.

104

K-5
Teachers,
Coaches, &
Leaders



10:55 AM - 11:45 AM

Concurrent Sessions C

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN INQUIRY-MINDED CLASSROOM

Catherine Barnhill

This session will offer participants manageable shifts and simple additions that can be made to any classroom to inspire curiosity, voice, and engagement - without rewriting curriculum or reinventing your practice. Learn to look at your planning and daily life through an inquiry lens while challenging yourself to question your decisions and stay curious in the best way possible!

105

K-2
Teachers

MATH IN MOTION: A HANDS-ON APPROACH TO MATH WORKSHOP

Taylor Wuerfel

Discover how to bring math workshop to life in early childhood classrooms. This session shares a practical framework for math workshop, strategies for building strong number sense, and ways to structure spiral review through hands-on stations and games. Participants will explore engaging K-2 math games that promote thinking, independence, and joyful learning.

204

K-2
Teachers

LITERACY WITHOUT LIMITS: BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS DISCIPLINES THROUGH INQUIRY

Michelle Kimpson

This session highlights inquiry-based strategies for strengthening content literacy across K-2 classrooms. Drawing on a cross-disciplinary project that integrates reading, writing, questioning, and critical thinking, participants will explore practical ways to build a culture of literacy that promotes student engagement, deeper content understanding, and learning across disciplines.

201

K-2
Teachers

BEYOND HANDS UP: INTERACTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR TOTAL PARTICIPATION

JP Shorter

Compliance is not engagement—students must think, respond, and stay actively involved. Inspired by Dr. Anita Archer's insight that we must "gain attention and maintain attention," this session equips teachers with simple, high-impact strategies to boost participation, motivation, and student ownership of learning. Walk away with easy-to-implement techniques that work across all subjects—ready to use tomorrow!

101

K-5
Teachers &
Coaches

WRITING WITH LOVE

Nozsa Kyler & Students

Every individual possesses unique passions that foster self-assurance and authenticity. This session offers practical strategies to cultivate student engagement in writing while systematically honoring the diverse cultural backgrounds they bring to the academic environment.

302

2-5
Teachers

INQUIRY INTO THE WILD: EXPLORING THE NATURAL WORLD THROUGH RESEARCH, LITERACY, & DISCOVERY

Tracy Etu & Students

This session explores inquiry-based learning through integration across subjects. Students utilize inquiry skills to select and research a continent, country, and animal from that region. They use diverse print and digital resources to create an informational project, including a zoo-style plaque. The project is launched by a class study of gorillas and integrated with the book, *The One and Only Ivan*, to establish a strong foundation for interdisciplinary inquiry.

104

3-5
Teachers

10:55 AM - 11:45 AM

Concurrent Sessions C

FROM EMPATHY TO ACTION: EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO CREATE CHANGE THROUGH READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCH

Chris Hass & Katie Kelly

This session explores strategies for empowering students to transform empathy into meaningful action through reading, writing, and research. Participants will explore approaches for guiding learners to investigate real-world issues, examine multiple perspectives, and develop as change agents. Educators will gain practical tools to foster student agency, critical thinking, and social responsibility, helping students connect classroom learning to positive change in their communities.

202

K-5
Teachers

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Sumner Livingston, Michele Miller, & Students

In this session, educators will get an inside glimpse into two inquiry units conducted by 5th-grade students at Satchel Ford Elementary. Participants will have a front row seat to an in-depth, hands-on discovery into the world of journalism and the creation and publication of student-generated magazines, as well as a study into our national parks' system, where participants will see the behind-the-scenes work of creating brochures and trail guides for various parks around the country. Participants will have the opportunity to see these projects from idea generation to final publication and will be able to hear from students as well as teachers.

303

3-5
Teachers

FROM "WHAT" TO "WHY" – USING PHENOMENON-BASED INQUIRY TO DRIVE STUDENT AGENCY

April Beale

This session explores how to transition from traditional science instruction to student-driven inquiry using "anchoring phenomena." Drawing from OpenSciEd strategies, the presenter demonstrates how to use a Driving Question Board to center student curiosity in any middle-level science unit. Participants will learn practical techniques to shift from "learning about" a topic to "figuring out" how the world works through investigation.

304

6-8
Teachers

FIND YOUR PEOPLE: A NETWORKING, COLLABORATION, & INNOVATION SESSION

Emily Whitecotton, Arthur Newton, Nathan O'Neill, & Julius Scott

Join CFI's Principal and some of her best thinking partners from Richland School District Two and Lexington-Richland School District Five for a structured connection session to explore collective efficacy and effective innovative practices. Participants will engage in a process of prioritizing some ideas from today's conference for further development, sharing them, and considering any new collaborations that might result!

16

K-8
Teachers & Leaders

WELCOMING INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS AS COLLEAGUES

Zaida Prater, Lyn Mueller, Elias Gastelum, Deirdre Nally, & Marco Hernandez

International teachers bring unique cultural perspectives to our schools, but their challenges often go unrecognized. Join International Teachers and Instructional Coaches as they share insights from their collaborative experiences and provide recommendations for teachers and administrators to foster successful relationships and support cultural exchange in the classroom.

301

K-8
Teachers & Leaders

JOYFUL LEADERSHIP, POWERFUL OUTCOMES: CULTIVATING THRIVING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Janet Campbell, Margaret "Casey" Davis, & Quantina Haggwood

In today's educational landscape, leaders who intentionally center joy in their practice are seeing measurable academic gains, stronger staff engagement, and more resilient school cultures. Through stories from the field and evidence of impact, the presenters will explore how joyful leadership becomes a strategic lever for powerful outcomes. Participants will leave with practical leadership moves that build thriving school communities.

102

K-8
Coaches & Leaders

CLOSING ADDRESS

11:55 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

From Reflection to Action

Heidi Mills, Jordan Page, Eliza Braden, Lesley Snyder, Quantina Haggwood, & Regina Ciphrah

EXHIBITS, CONFERENCE SPONSORS, & HOST

Special thanks to the Center for Educational Partnerships and the S.C. School Improvement Council at the University of South Carolina for sponsoring, and to the Center for Inquiry in Richland School District Two for hosting the 2026 Inquiry Matters conference. Thank you to Verbalizing Visions for providing the virtual conference option, Heinemann Educational Books for the conference discount, and GG's Library for offering children's books and professional texts for purchase. Thanks also to the Watkins-Nance News Crew for documenting the event and sharing coverage on the Inquiry Matters website.



SCHOOLS, DISTRICTS, & UNIVERSITIES REPRESENTED

A.J. Lewis Greenvew Elementary - Beechwood Middle School -
Beth White Education Consultant LLC - Burnside Elementary -
Center for Inquiry - Chapin Elementary School - Fords Pond Elementary
- Furman University - Irmo Elementary School -
James Madison University - Lake Carolina School Upper Campus -
Lexington Richland School District Five - Lexington Richland School
District Five Cradle to Career Network - Newberry Middle School -
Piney Woods Elementary - Richland School District One -
Richland School District Two - Satchel Ford Elementary -
Sharper Minds Literacy Group LLC - South Carolina Writing
Improvement Network - Verbalizing Visions LLC -
Watkins Nance Elementary - Westwood Elementary School -
University of South Carolina



Inquiry
MATTERS

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Reflection.